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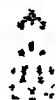
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One gift the Fairies gave me . . .  
The love of Books, the Golden Key  
That opens the Enchanted Door.  
*Andrew Lang.*

## PREFACE

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"BOOKS that have influenced me" was the last talk that the late Rt. Hon. Srinivasa Sastri gave from the Madras Station of the A. I. R.: and what bookman in India could discourse on such a theme with more eloquence or discernment? At Mr. Natesan's request Mr. Sastri was good enough to expand the thesis with a view to making it the first contribution for a symposium. The subject was so catching that other distinguished writers responded with alacrity to the request to join the symposium. The result is the volume now presented to the public.

Mr. Sastri defined the scope of his thesis with his wonted precision. "My business to-day" he said, "is to mention the books that, above all others, have made me what I am, furnished my mind with its best material, directed my habits and modes of thought, and informed my spirit with its characteristic aims and ideals." And this task he fulfilled with a completeness that set the standard for others who followed with their experiences. It is said there are books for a time and books for all time, and one man's food is another man's poison. And the writers, who are all well-known figures in contemporary life, have given their experiences in their own characteristic way. They have done it with

a freedom and candour that cannot fail to impress readers, whether young or old. Some have confined themselves to books that have influenced their "mind" as distinguished from those that have influenced their "character" and "moral being." Some have dealt with literature that proved a turning point in their life and thought. Some have extended the scope of literature to the authors of books and the influence of their personality on their life and conduct. While some have pointed to the literature that made a difference in their outlook and life, others have freely browsed over the whole field of literature that has claimed their interest and appreciation. Altogether the approach to this subject by the distinguished writers who have joined the symposium is as varied as it is interesting.

When we talk of the influence of books we mean the influence of what De Quincey calls the literature of power as distinguished from the literature of knowledge—knowledge of useful arts and sciences. These doubtless have their uses in shaping our vocations or augmenting our fortunes, but it is the power and glory of great literature to effect a transformation in ourselves. Not what we have, but what we become, is the test of that influence.

Naturally the influence of such literature is more subtle, more intangible but nonetheless more real and more profound. Who could read without being moved to tears—tears that purge the soul of its dross—Plato's superb account of the final scene in "The Life and Death of Socrates" where he recounts in words of matchless pathos, simplicity and dignity the tender grace, the noble equanimity and wise resignation of the Master as he passed into the great unknown? And yet only poetry and the works of imagination have the power to affect us in that way. Their influence is imperceptible like the odour of flowers. The main distinction of this kind of literature is that it never becomes stale or superseded by the march of time or progress of ideas. No new discovery in the world of science nor new thought in philosophy will make the *Odyssey* or the *Ramayana* out of date. These great Epics deal with the elemental things,

On man, on nature and on human life,  
—the conflicting passions of mortals, their hopes and fears and ambitions, their joys and sorrows, which having been must ever be. They are the same all the world over and for all time. Hence the eternal freshness and power of the great classics of antiquity. And strangely enough

The sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

"More and more," said Matthew Arnold, "Mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. . . . There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. . . . The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry." That explains the extraordinary hold that great literature from Valmiki and Homer, and Shakespeare and Cervantes, down to Hardy and Landor, and Tolstoy and Rolland, has upon the hearts of men. What wonder that the distinguished writers in this symposium revert again and again to these masterpieces for comfort and consolation, no less than for inspiration and for sheer joy.

The publishers desire, in conclusion, to take this opportunity to thank the writers for the courtesy and readiness with which they have responded to their request. They have no doubt that coming generations will be benefited by the knowledge of what has gone to the making of their fathers.

MADRAS. }  
 March '47. }

B. NATESAN

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# BOOKS THAT HAVE INFLUENCED ME

I. RT. HON. DR. V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI

I am not a man of one book or of a few select books. That is to say, there are no favourite books to which I recur again and again for inspiration or pleasure. Even the Ramayana I do not read daily. I have read quite a lot in my time, though my taste is not so comprehensive or indiscriminate as that of many whom I know. For instance, my old friend Professor K. B. Ramanathan, who found the day too short for his reading, was omnivorous. From him I took many tips. One of them it is interesting to recall. Of railway novels and detective fiction he was no lover. Whatever the original noise a book made, he would say, "Let us wait for a year and see if it maintains its vogue." I have known many persons to whom the reading of these books is like smoking or chewing, a habit that gains a hold on them and must be

indulged without pause. Like our *nitya karma* its interruption brings unhappiness, while its performance ceases to be a lively enjoyment. Never fond of them, I have now come to look upon them as a tempting sin and grudge them even an hour of my time. From boyhood, books have been to me more than a learned interest or purveyors of useful knowledge. When they are of some real merit, I have consciously let them govern my conduct and clarify my notions of right and wrong. In a sense it is true every book makes you wiser and imperceptibly affects your sense of life's values. But I often took a good book more seriously. I would close it while in the act of reading and attempt to digest its lessons and send the new thoughts coursing round my mental frame and assimilate them to be part of my inner being. In my boyish immaturity, I remember Edgeworth's *Moral Tales* and *Popular Tales* helped my growth in this way. From Smiles's books *Self-Help* and *Character* I somehow turned away by

instinct. Though I could not formulate the grounds of my repugnance, I fancy their tautology and pompous preaching repelled me. At a certain age even a child wishes to eat with its own fingers and not out of the maternal spoon.

A book's influence takes many shapes. In some cases it dazzles you by sheer skill of presentation. Your admiration is roused and your fancy tickled, but no lasting benefits seem to accrue. Take De Quincey for example. His pages are a lure, but I cannot testify that they add real profit to the mind or enhance one's power of expression. At the other end are treasures of literature which affect you profoundly, but whose influence on your attitude to life or your conduct it is difficult to trace precisely. I would place in this category the great plays of Shakespeare and moving orations like those of Burke. Who can escape the instruction of Scott's novels or the edification of George Eliot's? Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning go deeper down in your

#### 4 BOOKS THAT HAVE INFLUENCED ME

nature and shape it to finer issues. I have felt the spell of these and other writers and should be much the poorer if by any chance I lost what they have given me. But I understand my business today is to mention the books that, above all others, have made me what I am, furnished my mind with its best material, directed my habits and modes of thought, and informed my spirit with its characteristic aims and ideals. Such sources of mental and moral inspiration can be but few, and I should find it no easy task to define exactly or evaluate what they have done for me. I trust my readers would bring their own particular experience from its intimate recesses to understand and judge mine. Their charity and their indulgence to a fellow-traveller in the jungle of life I take for granted.

A word of qualification is necessary before I begin an account of the sources from which flow the main elements of my build. Guidance to others is foreign to my purpose. I do not venture to suggest-

that you should drink from the fountains where I slaked my thirst. My *amrita* may be your poison. Like theories and modes, books change from age to age, and for the nutriment of the mind it is idle to expect our children to resort to the same foods that we ate. I have often expressed wonder that the school books now in fashion differ so vastly from the ones on which we were brought up. The curricula of Universities are modified so slightly from year to year that we hardly notice the change, but within a generation they accumulate formidably and make a revolution. Both in substance and in manner the education of today differs from mine to such an extent that I marvel at the continuity that seems to bind in one whole the process by which the generations link themselves together. Is it a fact that the seminal books of the world are but a few and that in one form or in another they alone have been the firm rock on which in differing periods of history differing philosophies, differing moralities,

## 6 BOOKS THAT HAVE INFLUENCED ME

and differing sciences have been erected? Sometimes I think Yes and sometimes No. Books for a time and books for all time—are there really two such classes? The *Iliad* and the *Ramayana* can never die, so say our idealists. The *Vedas*, we swear, had no beginning and will have no end. Grand conceptions these, which it were vandalism to examine historically or appraise scientifically. To how few of the world's population of nearly two thousand million do they mean anything? In our own homes they have long ceased to be a direct means of enlightenment, and where they are, exist only in translations, in unconnected fragments which hide more than they reveal. If then I name a few authors who have taught me the essence of what I know and believe, I do not pretend even for a moment that you cannot find other or better guides to the world's wisdom.

Knowledge of scientific truths, though it shifts from time to time, is foundational. All other knowledge rests on it and is

fortified by it. The most authoritarian of our Vedic preceptors put observation and experience above the word. Every one of us who has been to school will recall the wonders which dawned upon him in the science classes, destroying right and left many fondly cherished superstitions. When I was first introduced to science books, I grasped, with a sureness which now astonishes me as I recall it, the scientific spirit, that is the spirit of scientific inquiry which doubts and questions and shrinks from generalizing beyond the ascertained facts. Tyndall's *Lectures* opened my eyes first to the true methods of science. Another book of those early days which gave a permanent turn to my thought was a collection of T. H. Huxley's writings and speeches containing a marvellous exposition of Man's Place in Nature. Harder food followed in a few years from the same source. Few people will remember now that the English Men of Letters series includes a volume on Hume from the pen of Huxley. Hume's life is

dismissed in a brief chapter and the rest of the book is a gripping exposition of his philosophy. It was a pity I had not learned at college the elements of metaphysics, and I would go so far as to say that liberal education is defective without an analysis of the workings of the human mind. As I applied my untutored mind to the doctrines under examination, I remember the slowness of my progress, and the despair that often crushed me. But I had intellectual pride and a firm belief that perseverance can conquer mountains. So I used to take the volume, repair to a corner free from disturbance, con the sentences again and again, read before and after, and to my good luck experience those thrills of joy which attend mental conquests, and which, whether at the moment or in retrospect, transcend all other human pleasure. My progress was necessarily interrupted and uncertain. In the end, however, by dint of hard reflection and meditation, I mastered the book, and the gain to my

knowledge and power of consecutive thought was incalculable. Several years later Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* added a concluding chapter to this aspect of my education. Written in his most mature and attractive style, it seems to supply a corrective to his original teachings but, properly studied, it is only a supplement thereto. From the purely literary point of view, it is a master-piece which I would commend to my younger readers.

To this category belong Herbert Spencer's *Sociology*, and John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women*, *On Liberty*, and *Three Essays on Natural Religion*. I have not freshened up my memory for the occasion. The impressions now recorded are those left on my mind when I last read them. It would obviously be inappropriate to ascribe past preferences to present feelings. Spencer overwhelmed me by the wealth of material on any point gathered from all departments of human interest, and the touch of emotion that here and there warmed the treatment

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of his subject. Mill struck me as more economical and selective in the use of words and perhaps not so copious of illustration. Reference to contemporaries and their modes of thought was dispassionate and absolutely fair. The aim, one could see, was a genuine quest for the truth and not the establishment of favoured or partisan views. It was a rare adventure to me—of exploration and discovery in a fascinating sphere of speculation, all aglow with the excitement of a novice without a trace of prepossession. Recapture of my wonderment is not possible. All I can now recall is that I was journeying in a region of captivating ideas, at the same time subtle and precise, imponderable and well-defined. To the extent that I am exact in thought and lucid in its presentation, and that my management of a topic is just, comprehensive and helpful to the reader, I owe the virtues to the influence of these mighty teachers.

The foundations of my moral and spiritual nature were laid by a large number of books,

of which I will select three for the depth and pervasiveness of their teaching. The *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* stirred me deeply by their utter sincerity and high-souled philanthropy. Curious as it may seem, Tolstoy took me captive by his *The Kingdom of God is within You*. I remember how the revelation came on me with a rush. Much that I have read since in English and Sanskrit is fully on a level with it, but the way it carried the citadel of my heart is an abiding memory, which I would not lose for the world. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* gave a vision, as bright as it was clear, of a problem that had long been vexing me, and for the first time in my experience, set the position of women in correct perspective. Hardy, I have no doubt, meant to startle a convention-ridden and heartless world to a consciousness of the essence of chastity by his sub-title "*The Story of a Pure Woman*". It is audacious, but he makes it out to be just and proper. The taint is inflicted on Tess while she is hardly aware of what is

Society is judged from several angles in *Les Misérables*. No doubt individuals make society and contribute to its shifting phases in different ways. But at any given moment of our present state of evolution the pressure upon us of law, custom, economic conditions, hygienic environments and other like factors is such that from the cradle to the grave it is only in a very limited degree that we are the architects of our own fortune, and may be held responsible for what we are and what we do. Saints and criminals alike arise out of the soil and atmosphere. Properly understood, this truth ought to have overpowering influence on our judgement and make us members one of another to a degree that we hardly dream of. *Jean Valjean* brings this lesson home in the most forceful and convincing manner. The story is one of the great epics of the world; the events and characters alike are cast in large moulds, and the sensitive reader is instructed, edified, scolded, exhorted and by every possible means shaped to be fit for a happier world than

he now knows. Out of this vast storehouse of experience and history we carry away just so much wisdom as we are capable of. But there is no one, however exalted in station, however wise, however powerful, who can leave a study of this book without being summoned with the compelling majesty of supernatural law to the recognition of a more humane code of behaviour and a more altruistic sense of duty. If any of my readers has not yet read this book, I bid him, with the authority that belongs to age and knowledge of the deeps and shoals of life, to get hold of a copy at once and benefit to the full by the treasures that its pages enshrine.

One immortal product of the human mind I have kept to the end. The *Ramayana*, I hold to be almost without a rival in the world's literature. Whether we judge by the grandeur of the theme, by the variety of characters portrayed, by the tone of its idealism, or by the appeal that it makes to the devout heart, it ranks amongst the noblest monuments of the poetic genius.

To those who cannot read it in the original, I would unhesitatingly recommend resort to translations. Even through media the narrative shines with rich brilliance. The wise say that if you cannot scale the Himalayas you would do well to go to the foot and take in the infinite variety of nature that meets the eye. All parts of the book reward the reverent reader. But we may not expect homogeneity of treatment in a composition of its size. The pious pupil has therefore by long tradition selected certain *kandas* and *sargas* for repeated study and ascribed to each selection specific forms of mystic or worldly efficacy. I open the book at all times and with no particular expectation of improved health or auspicious prognostication. It never fails me. The distilled experience of ages is given in stanzas of exquisite sententious grace. Hermitages, described with wealth of household and sacrificial detail, invite you as to the intimacy of home. Forests and mountains and rivers, in pristine untamed grandeur, lose their terror in Valmiki's pages, for

while he mentions with particularity the paths and thorny lanes, the river-fords and the giant shelter-giving trees, he makes only occasional and unexciting allusions to the bloody fights and devastations of beasts of prey, the bites and stings of poisonous insects, and the diseases and deformities caused by them, the movements, from untenable to promising spots, of hamlets harassed by flood and fire and famine. A seeming exception is mentioned towards the end of Ayodhya kanda. A colony of rishis migrate, to escape the cannibal Khara and his followers.. They invite Rama and party to join, but these decline. Ah, how I should love to learn and teach in those sanctuaries, guru and sishya bathing in safe pools together, chanting the Vedas aloud till the hills threw the sacred sounds back and the sylvan gods sat up and listened, our mutual companionship unperturbed by fear of lightning strikes or menacing processions or shootings by the king's police!

Of the countless benefits—one may even call them blessings—that the *Ramayana*

can confer the highest is the training of the emotions and of the spirit. Of the lessons it teaches, the highest seems to me to be the exaltation of *dharma*. On its altar everything must be sacrificed, reverently and cheerfully. To fulfil his father's promises and save his honour, Rama twice renounced the kingdom of Kosala, once in Ayodhya when his father offered it, and later in Chitrakuta when Bharata laid it at his feet. The passages in which this self-denial is narrated are among the noblest in the poem. The debate between the brothers is a gem without price. We are told that the gods came down to listen, for even amongst them such high arguments were seldom heard. Bharata was tired out and, though neither confounded nor struck dumb, gave in. But it is remarkable that at heart he seems to have been unconvinced. Nor was Lakshmana converted to the stern view to the end. Next only to Sri Rama in sublimity of character, why did they not catch his perception of duty? Vasishtha too seems to have fallen short of the theme. I dare

not dogmatize, but shall ask leave to suggest timidly that the poet meant them as foils so that his hero may stand on an unapproachable pedestal.

If Rama was prepared for dire penalties in paying his father's debts, what would he not suffer to pay his own? When Sita remonstrated with him for taking other people's quarrels on his own head and inviting unnecessary risks, he proclaimed the sanctity of his word once given and swore he would abandon her, Lakshmana and life itself before abandoning a promise. These high protestations were put to the test ere long. Not indeed in an attempt to maintain his fidelity to a solemn undertaking. For dharma, inexorable dharma came to him in diverse forms. His personal honour and the purity of the Ikshvaku race were inextricably mixed and no sacrifice was too great to preserve it. Twice when his queen's name was called in question, he threw her to the wolves. Then Lakshmana's life lay forfeit when he left his post of duty under the cruel compulsion of circumstances.

Vasishtha had to intercede to get the penalty-commuted into banishment. The immolations ordered by Rama were at first loudly-protested against; but as the iron strength of his will became known, people submitted as to the decrees of blind fate. This is eloquent testimony not only to the sempiternal validity of the ideals that he-enforced, but to the mighty ascendancy that he established over the hearts of those that came under his influence. The author who conceived and delineated the character of Rama in such convincing detail as we have in the *Ramayana* is a supreme genius, Poet, prophet or seer has seldom presented to the mind of man so noble an apotheosis of duty.

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## II. SIR C. V. RAMAN

AS has been remarked by Robert Louis Stevenson in a charming little essay on this subject, it is scarcely possible to speak of books that have influenced one without finding oneself engaged on an auto-biographical essay of a sort. A man's outlook on the problems of life is necessarily moulded by the influences to which he has been subject, and especially by the influences brought to bear on him when at an impressionable age. The share which books have had in shaping his mental outlook and ultimately also his career in life, is, I fancy a highly variable one, and to no small extent dependent on the person's environment at home and at school in his early days. Indeed, a good home and a good school may be judged by the kind of books they put in the way of the growing young person for him to feed his mind and his emotions upon. I believe it is the exception rather than the rule for the

books which are formally taught at school and at college to exercise any profound influence on the mind of the student. The element of compulsion introduced in the prescription of books for study is usually fatal to that attitude of mind which is necessary for the full appreciation of their contents. It is the books the merits of which you have, so to say, discovered for yourself, that really influence you.

The failure to recognise this elementary fact of human psychology, namely the antithesis between choice and compulsion, is responsible for the unfruitful character of a vast amount of scholastic effort in the way of both teaching and learning. I can tell you here a story about myself or rather against myself in this connection. Forty-five years ago, a well-meaning University prescribed Robert Louis Stevenson's well-known story "Kidnapped" as an English text for the First Arts course. I do not remember the precise number of times this text was taught or lectured upon in class, or the precise number o

times I read through the book during the two years' course of study for the examination. The copy I purchased and used disappeared in due course. One evening, a couple of years ago, a copy of Stevenson's "Kidnapped" beautifully printed and bound caught my eye at a Railway bookstall. I was tempted to buy it and took it home and started reading the book before going to bed. Believe it or not, the story or rather the manner of its telling, gripped me so powerfully that I had to finish reading the whole book at a sitting before retiring for the night. I had, so to say, discovered Stevenson's magic charm of writing for myself. Since then, I have read everything that Stevenson wrote with the keenest enjoyment.

I finished my school and college career and my University examinations at the age of eighteen. In this short span of years had been compressed the study of four languages and of a great variety of diverse subjects, in several cases up to the highest University standards. A list of

all the volumes I had to study would be of terrifying length. Did these books influence me? Yes, in the narrow sense of making me tolerably familiar with subjects so diverse as Ancient Greek and Roman history, modern Indian and European History, Formal Logic, Economics, Monetary Theory and Public Finance, the later Sanskrit writers and the minor English authors, to say nothing of Physiography, Chemistry and a dozen branches of Pure and Applied Mathematics, and of Experimental and Theoretical Physics. But out of all this welter of subjects and books, can I pick out anything that helped really to mould my mental and spiritual outlook and determine my chosen path in life? Yes, I can and I shall mention three books.

A purposeful life, needs an axis or hinge to which it is firmly fixed and yet around which it can freely revolve. As I see it, this axis or hinge has been, in my own case, strangely enough, not the love of science nor even the love of Nature, but a certain abstract idealism or belief in the

value of the human spirit and the virtue of human endeavour and achievement. The nearest point to which I can trace this source of idealism is my recollection of reading Edwin Arnold's great book, *The Light of Asia*. I remember being powerfully moved by the story of Siddhartha's great renunciation, of his search for truth and of his final enlightenment. This was at a time when I was young enough to be impressionable, and the reading of the book fixed firmly in my mind the idea that this capacity for renunciation in the pursuit of exalted aims is the very essence of human greatness. This is not an unfamiliar idea to us in India, but it is not easy to live up to. It has always seemed to me a surprising and regrettable fact that the profound teaching of the Buddha has not left a deeper and stronger impress on the life of our country of which he was the greatest son that ever lived.

The next of the books that I have to mention is one of the most remarkable

works of all time, namely, The Elements of Euclid. Familiarity with some parts of Euclid and a certain dislike of its formalism have dethroned this great work from the apparently unassailable position which it occupied in the esteem of the learned world for an almost incredibly long period of time. Indeed, my own early reactions to the compulsory study of Euclid were anything but favourable. The reason for this is, I think, to be found in the excessive emphasis placed on the subject as an intellectual discipline and the undue attention given to details as distinguished from its broader aspects. To put it a little differently, the student of Euclid is invited to look at the trees and to examine their branches and twigs so minutely, that he ceases even to be conscious of the existence of the wood. The real value of Geometry appears when we consider it as a whole, not as merely as the properties of straight lines, triangles and circles, but of everything else, curves, figures and solids of all kinds. Thus regarded,

Geometry makes a profound appeal both to our senses and to our intellect. Indeed, of all branches of Mathematics, it is that which links most closely what we see with the eye with what we perceive by reasoning. The ancient Greeks had a fine sense of the value of intellectual discipline, they had also a fine sense of the beautiful. They loved Geometry just because it had both these appeals. In my early years, it was a great struggle for me to learn to overcome the dislike of the formalism of Euclid and gradually to perceive the fascination and beauty of the subject. Not until many years later, however, did I fully appreciate the central position of Geometry in relation to all natural knowledge. I can illustrate this relationship by a thousand examples but will content myself with remarking that every mineral found in Nature, every crystal made by man, every leaf, flower or fruit that we see growing, every living thing from the smallest to the largest that walks on earth, flies in the air or swims in the waters or lives deep down.

on the ocean floor, speaks aloud of the fundamental role of Geometry in Nature. The pages of Euclid are like the opening bars of the music in the grand opera of Nature's great drama. So to say, they lift the veil and show to our vision a glimpse of a vast world of natural knowledge awaiting study.

Of all the great names in the world of learning that have come down to us from the remote past, that of Archimedes, by common consent, occupies the foremost place. Speaking of the modern world, the supremest figure, in my judgment is that of Hermann Von Helmholtz. In the range and depth of his knowledge, in the clearness and profundity of his scientific vision, he easily transcended all other names I could mention, even including Isaac Newton. Rightly he has been described as the intellectual Colossus of the nineteenth century. It was my great good fortune, while I was still a student at college, to have possessed a copy of an English translation of his great work on "The Sensations of Tone." As is well

known, this was one of Helmholtz's masterpieces. It treats the subject of music and musical instruments not only with profound knowledge and insight, but also with extreme clarity of language and expression. I discovered this book for myself and read it with the keenest interest and attention. It can be said without exaggeration that it profoundly influenced my intellectual outlook. For the first time, I understood from its perusal what scientific research really meant and how it could be undertaken. I also gathered from it a variety of problems for research which were later to occupy my attention and keep me busy for many years. Helmholtz had written yet another great masterpiece entitled "The Physiology of Vision." Unfortunately, this was not available to me as it had not then been translated into the English language.

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### III. MR. C. JINARAJADASA

ONE of the happiest experiences of an educated man is the constant looking back on authors who have inspired him. Therefore the truly educated man is a lover of books, and surrounds himself with books. Each book is the voice of a guide and friend; and so to possess books is to be rich in friendship. I say "to possess books", not merely to have them on the shelves. The distinction is obvious, and need not be expatiated upon.

There are certain authors to whom I turn constantly. Even if I do not pick out so very often one of their books from my shelves, their thoughts are somewhere at the back of my mind, especially as I try to create anything literary or artistic.

Foremost of these are the unknown authors of the twelve principal Upanishads. In one way or another, every phase of philosophy is somewhere to be found in an Upanishad, not necessarily fully developed but only in germ. And as all philosophies



he makes you see the growth of the soul as well. He uses a language almost perfect for poetry, for Italian has a diamond-like clearness. And in addition, Italian has an artistic sweetness and sonority which, in the hands of a master like Dante, makes whatever he says so said, that it could not by any possibility be said in a better or truer or more beautiful way.

After Dante comes Richard Wagner. He is best known for his music-dramas, for in them he has made unity of abstract music and the drama which no one ever before has attempted. Combine the dramas of Aeschylus with the lofty music of Beethoven, and you get something of what Wagner dreamed of as art and life. If one could imagine Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet", or his "King Lear" raised to the nth in their emotional and artistic appeal, that is what one finds in one of Wagner's typical musical dramas like *Lohengrin* or *Parsifal*. As to his great Trilogy, *The Ring of the Niebelung*, which takes four successive evenings to perform, we see in it the



in darkness, because we have not yet cared to understand Ruskin.

My walls are full of books, but if I were going to be exiled to a desert island with only a few of the world's books permitted to be taken, I should select just these few: a volume of the twelve Upanishads, the Bible, the Sutta Nipata, Dante's Divine Comedy, Hardy's poems, the two Oxford books of English and Spanish verse, Wagner's Niabelungen Ring, and a Shakespeare. And why so few? Because I have discovered my world of literature, and what I read in these reflects my own inner discovery.

It is because these authors have inspired me to "live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow The King"—that unseen King who is the Atman in the universe and in myself—, I say to each: "Tasmai Sri Gurave Namah!"

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#### IV. MR. JUSTICE M. C. CHAGLA

AS a child I was rather lonely and sensitive. I rarely found any pleasure in outdoor games or walks or excursions. Being highly imaginative, I liked to live in a world of romance and high adventure. I got over my loneliness by inhabiting my world with characters from fiction and my sensitiveness, which made me eschew ordinary company, by making myself at home with imaginary or legendary figures from books. In those early days I read a large number of novels—not all necessarily possessing literary merit. I well remember a friend of mine had a set of the novels of Dumas. I read them all. And I saw the panorama and the majestic flow of French history not through the dull narration of a pedantic historian, but in the colourful pages of a romantic artist.

I read a great deal of trash, but fortunately my taste developed as I read on. Like all young men, I absorbed the

pages of Dickens, Scott and Thackeray. Two authors who influenced me a great deal were Anatole France and Thomas Hardy. The former is the master of ironic pity. The latter teaches us that we are mere play-things in the hands of a blind and pitiless Fate. I hope I have learnt from these two masters tolerance and sympathy for human weakness and frailty. I have always been reluctant to pass moral judgments on the failings of my fellow-men. I always try to realise how little they are due to deliberate volition and how much to the relentless force of circumstances.

Even now I have kept up my interest in and contact with literature. It constitutes for me an ivory tower into which I can retire from the dulness and drabness of every day existence. In our natures there is a duality—a conflict which requires to be resolved. The prose and poetry in us are always struggling—clamouring to be harmonised. However much the world may be with us, we have a craving for

the ideal and a longing to reach out our hands 'to the stars. It is undoubtedly good for our souls from time to time to betake ourselves to this ivory tower and dream of a world more after our heart's desire.

Poetry, too, had, and always has, a special appeal for me. People do not always realise what beauty and magic mere words have; and how when strung together like pearls in designs inspired by the poet's imagination, they can move the soul to ecstasy. Frankly, modern free verse does not appeal to me much; I am old-fashioned enough to want to hear music in the poet's fancy expressed in verse. I shall never forget that day in Oxford, when sitting in my room in my College, a friend read to me a poem of Swinburne. It went to my head like heady wine. I did not know that mere words could produce such glorious music. The sadness and pathos of Hardy's poetry; the economy of words with which Housman gives expression to his bitter pessimism;

the greatest lyrical poem—Cynara—in which Dowson has poured out his heart in quest of a hopeless love; all these have moved me so deeply that they must have influenced me for better or for worse. In this ruthless age reading of poetry is considered rather effeminate. It is certainly not a pastime of strong silent men. But I am neither one nor the other. And if my heart still aches at the misery and misfortunes of my fellow-men, it may be that poetry has made me soft and weak.

I must also mention the drama. From the earliest days the theatre had an irresistible fascination for me. Till I went to England, I did not see many plays, but I read a very large number. The dramatist gives to his composition a unity and coherence which it is possible for very few artists to give when working through a different medium. Most of us require a lifetime to solve the problems which society and our surroundings set us. But the dramatist sets the problem and solves it within two hours on the stage.

and in the course of three or four acts. We see the conflict of emotions and loyalties, the development of character against the decrees of an inscrutable fate, and the price exacted by nature for human folly. Even in this celluloid age, when the screen has practically vanquished the stage, I find that I am still thrilled by the beauty of the human voice and the nobility of the human gesture.

Of course I read Shakespeare. I doubted with Hamlet, realised with Lady Macbeth that all the perfumes of Araby cannot remove the taint of sin, suffered the pangs of jealousy with Othello, and laughed with Falstaff. I also read a great deal of Shaw. His lucidity, his rationalism, his hatred for humbug, his flair for being in advance of the times, his contempt for all conventions, influenced me a great deal.

Turning now to the more serious books which influenced me, I think biographies and autobiographies played the most important part. I liked to read in their lives how from nothing men by sheer

dint of character and by the infinite capacity for taking pains, which some prefer to call genius, rose to commanding heights. The one book which affected me most powerfully was Morley's *Life of Gladstone*. I discovered from it the perennial charm of Oxford, the fascination of party politics, how the voice of the people can rise superior to all the artifices of politicians, and how democracy, with all its slowness and wooden-headedness, is the best form of government.

It is difficult to say of any one book that it has influenced the whole of one's life. But I can, I think without exaggeration, say this of Morley's *Life of Gladstone*. I knew very little of Oxford, and I had no clear idea of going to England for prosecuting my studies. When I read of young Gladstone's life at Christ Church, the companionship and friendship he enjoyed, the intellectual atmosphere in which he worked where the keenest intellects subjected every problem to the most searching analysis, the Union

and other debating societies where he argued and debated, the physical beauty of the place where the dreaming spires and the winding river make every young man dream dreams of how he would re-fashion the world, I made up my mind that I wanted nothing so much as to be able to go to that University. The opportunity came when the war was over and the armistice was signed in November 1918. I was still very young. I was only eighteen, and I was in Intermediate Arts. But I was determined to take my plunge. Unbeknown to my parents I went and saw the Registrar of our University. He had grown grey in its service and thousands of students had passed through his hands. I told him I wanted to go to Oxford, and whether he could secure me an admission. He asked me whether there was any particular College I wanted to go to. Without the slightest hesitation I said Christ Church. He looked at me and asked me why I wanted to go there and whether I knew any one there. I told

him that that was the only College at Oxford I knew anything about, and that Gladstone had been there. He smiled and told me that I had some curious ideas—which was very true. Some months later, I received intimation from him to go and see him. I went and I was informed that I had been admitted to Lincoln College. He noticed the look of disappointment on my face. He was a kind old man, and he patted me on my back, and consoled me by saying that it was not a bad little College. I went to that College and on the very first day when I entered the Hall to have my dinner I saw a very large portrait of a distinguished alumnus of the College. I went up to it to see what name it bore. And I found it was Lord Morley. By a strange twist of fate, if I had not gone to Gladstone's College I had gone to that of his Biographer's whose book had been solely responsible for my coming to Oxford at all. When later I read Morley's recollections, I learnt the curious reason which had led young:



regularly at the Union and the Majlis and other societies; I took History and not Law as my subjects for the B.A., because I felt that politics without a background of History would be mere sound and fury without much substance. When I returned to India, I thought I had got my chance. I was fortunate enough to get into Jinnah's chambers who was the acknowledged leader of the Bar at the time. But it was more his politics than his brilliant advocacy that attracted me to him. I had come in contact with him before I went to England. I had read the small book of his collected speeches and also the brilliant foreward by Sarojini Naidu in which she hailed him as the apostle of Hindu-Muslim Unity. This little book laid the foundation of my political faith to which I have remained faithful and to which I have given my unswerving allegiance through good and bad times. While, Jinnah espoused the Nationalist cause I worked with him in my humble way on the platform of the Muslim

League. Then black clouds came over the horizon and Jinnah and I parted company. And with a wrench of the heart which I still feel, I said good-bye to politics and took up my present position. And so I learnt my big lesson, which was further reinforced by the book to which I shall presently refer, that it is the contingent or the fortuitous that plays the decisive part in one's life.

The book I want to refer to is Haldane's Autobiography. Haldane achieved a great many things in life with considerable distinction. He was an eminent lawyer and judge; he was a distinguished philosopher; and he was one of England's greatest war ministers. An early disappointment in love, instead of turning him bitter as it would have done most people, made him plunge into intense and unremitting work. At the Bar he learned the great secret which every lawyer should know—to find the underlying principles in dealing with facts, however apparently confused and complicated. He was

hounded out of public life during the last war, because he was considered pro-German owing to his deep interest in German philosophy. But when the whole of London was celebrating the victory, and he sat a lonely man in his flat forgotten by everyone, Field Marshal Douglas Haig called on him and left a message with him that he was the greatest Secretary of State for War England had ever had.

In the last chapter of his book, one of the finest and most moving I have ever read, and one which I often re-read, he sums up the philosophy of his life. He says that we should never disturb ourselves about the quantity of work turned out by us or our prominence with the public. "It is not any finality attained that can ever be ours; what can be ours can be no more than the best quality of which we are capable, put into the effort towards the attainment of what we have set before ourselves." He makes a passionate appeal for quality in thought and action. "Of knowledge we can at

best master only a fragment. But if the fragment has been reached by endeavour that is sufficiently passionate, the struggle towards it yields a sense of quality, of quality in the very effort made, which stands for us as being what we care for beyond everything else, as being for us truth, whatever else may not be certainly truth. And so life is not lived in vain though in the ends attained it may seem to have failed." He was once asked by a distinguished statesman whether he would like to live his life again, and his answer was an emphatic no. He felt that we greatly underrate the part that accident and good luck play in shaping our career and giving us such success as we have achieved. "The contingent plays a large part even in the best ordered lives, and we do well to ask of philosophy to teach us how to make ourselves detached from the circumstances it brings, whether happy or otherwise." And he ends up by saying that we can all acquire this philosophy if we keep ourselves humble

in mind and avoid self-seeking and vanity.

I must not overlook the influence that the study of history had on me. The development of ideas; the fight between poverty and privilege; the slow but sure triumph of freedom over tyranny; I liked to read of these rather than the rise and fall of dynasties and the expansion or contraction of temporal power. I thought a study of this would help me to understand the problems of my country where, at least so I thought, a nation was in the making, struggling towards freedom. Little did I realise that all this would have to be thrown on the scrap-heap, and all rational thought would be submerged by a torrential wave of communal frenzy.

We all have our disappointments and our heart-aches. And I am no exception to the general run of men. But I have found ever-sustaining comfort and solace in books. When life has seemed not worth while, when one's work has seemed futile and insignificant, the nobility of

purpose and the painstaking achievements of others recorded in books has brought a gleam of hope and encouragement, and endowed one's own struggle with a purpose and an objective.

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## V. MR. C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

THE books that influenced me are not what I read upon direction or advice but what by accident I came upon.

I found Thoreau's *Duty of Disobedience* on the table of a friend to whose house I went to spend some time chatting. I picked it up from a heap of miscellaneous papers—my friend was a fellow-lawyer with good practice—and found therein what enlarged later into something like a life-programme.

I went to prison once with a very restricted number of books of which one was a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*. Luckily I had not been forced to read this famous book when I was a boy and was therefore enabled when I was forty, to find in it not a stale child's story-book, but religious inspiration of permanent value.

Another small but great book that I chanced to read merely by accident was *The Trial and Death of Socrates*. It has shaped me as nothing else has done.

A fourth book that affected me as deeply as Socrates was J. S. Mill's *Liberty*. The unqualified attachment to truth as such is what appealed to me in both these philosophers.

Lastly I must mention Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* than which I have found no greater solace in hours of grief or when beset by evil.

May I add by way of caution that it is not English books that made me whatever I am. It is the stories my mother and two aunts of mine amused me with that built me up.

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## VI. SIR BOMANJI J. WADIA

**T**HERE have been in this world men and women whose ideals and actions have laid the foundations of social progress, justice, and fellow-feeling. There have been ideas which in shaping civilization have often proved as effective as actions. There have also been books which have influenced lives and shaped human affairs. All lovers of books must have at some time or other come under their influence in the course of their lives. Such books are servants of the good life and help to realize the ideal as far as possible. Many of us have in our own humble ways found in books a spiritual stream which has poured into our affairs, for there is a depth of thought in their pages which answers various human aspirations. The writers who have earned immortality are those in whose work there is something universal, and it is the universal appeal to the mind and heart which endures. In writing about the books that have

influenced me the difficulty is not so much of recollection as of selection. It is also difficult to avoid the first personal pronoun, but in places where this could not be helped no apology is necessary.

Personally, I can never forget the influence on my life wrought by the intensive reading of Shakespeare's great tragedies. They have always seemed to me unapproachable in the blend of their grandeur, poignancy, and infinity of background. Himself an actor of small parts not a very reputed calling in times which classed the actor with "rogues and vagabonds", he must have heard outside the stage about the deep tragedies of human passion which took the joy out of his heart. What exactly it was that deepened the aspect and darkened his brow we do not know, but his mind soon became engrossed with treachery, betrayal, ingratitude, jealousy, and unceasing ambition. The dark play of the tragedies took into my mind when I was still a college student, and I thought about the

eternal note of sadness that sounds for ever on the shores of human life. It chastened the spirits of my youth, and I spoke to my Professor about it. It was some consolation to hear that evil never triumphed in the end, and that the wages of sin was death. Not only was Shakespeare's thought impressive, but his manner of expression too was unforgettable. "To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow" are simple words, but they convey the endlessness of time and the infinite sadness of the speaker. "The rest is silence", are also simple words, but they produce that terrible futility of feeling which closes all earthly conflict with only the problem of the, hereafter grimly outstanding. I felt with the great author the glory and greatness of humanity's immemorial pain. I felt that suffering was the cornerstone of life. I felt that I was now the sadder man, but was too young yet to say that I also felt I was the wiser.

I would next mention Plato's Republic which gave me, though only in translation,

the fruit of a philosopher's quest for the ideal life. Here truly has the mortal put on immortality. Before Plato his master Socrates had sought after the truth, and finally gave up his life for it after being condemned by a tribunal which understood what truth was as much as Pontius Pilate did five centuries later. Truth, however, does not die on the cross nor does it perish in the poison cup, and the fearless consecration of life to a great cause leaves a deep impression behind. Plato's Republic is the most beautiful exposition extant of the idea that everything of value in this world has been accomplished by the free, inquiring critical spirit, the spirit which without limitation seeks the truth. Greek civilization had reached its peak in the fifth century B.C., but Plato knew that civilization is as near to savagery as rust is to steel. In his own ineffably beautiful simile, we are still imprisoned in our cave, with our backs to the light, and can only watch the shadows on the wall. So he outlined the ideal Republic, the City of

Light, the City of Friends with noble minds and warm hearts. In Plato's Republic there is no strife, no war of exchanges and fluctuating prices, no war of capital and labour, no desire of getting something out of nothing. The conquest of nature is not intensified. The town does not invade the country, the machine does not conquer man, and regimentation does not standardize life. One still turns to the pages of this great book for the foundations of our abstract arguments on justice, happiness, and education. Plato was the first to say that education must comprise the whole of life, and that it was essentially a matter of building character. Twenty-four centuries have elapsed since the book was written, and still our political writers and philosophical thinkers measure their conceptions against those of the great Athenian. A map of the world that does not locate the Republic is of little use, for it leaves out the one country on whose soil humanity has never ceased to attempt a landing.

Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is another book which influenced me as it must have influenced millions before and will influence millions hereafter. It is curious that a book which was written in prison without thought even of a possible reader has been as widely read as any other book in literature. It is the most perfect and complex of fairy tales, as Hallam calls it. It carries us to the serene heights of the soul, to the high altitudes where only what is noble and knightly can live. None of us can forget the adventures of Mr. Great-Heart, Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, and Mr. Facing-both-ways, nor places like the Slough of Despond, Vanity Fair and the Wicket Gate. I remember having read the author's life, a poor uneducated tinker, writing within prison-walls, the home of all those who have a conscience to follow and principles to guard. His life story is a part of the romance of the book. Christian had a soul to be saved, and he had to save it by his own effort. His progress on the perilous path

## 58 BOOKS THAT HAVE INFLUENCED ME

is true to the lives and experience of all of us. Its appeal is universal, and its wisdom has sunk deep into my mind. Bunyan believed that we live by the inner light and are greater than we know. He is of that rare band in whose company we experience a lifting, not a sinking, of the heart.

Another book that has left its abiding impress on me is Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. One may learn nothing from Boswell, but one becomes something. The book is a memorable exposition of the rarest of arts—the art of living. It awakens one to a sense of realism. A knowledge of the details of a man's life, including those of your hero, is a fine corrective to hero worship; for even when the worshipper is bent on idolizing, others come to know that the idol has often feet of clay. Macaulay's judgment of Boswell is a bit harsh, but Boswell was gross in his habits, his tastes were none too refined, and his hero worship often bordered on the verge of nausea. No scrubbing.



the cheerfulness of human books, without being happy about it? The book has passed into literature, and the epithet "Pickwickian" is part of the vocabulary. The first or the second chapter opens with a sunny passage—

That punctual servant of all work, the sun, had just risen and begun to strike a light on the morning of the thirteenth of May, one thousand eight hundred and twenty seven, when Mr. Samuel Pickwick burst like another sun from his slumbers, throw open his chamber window, and looked out upon the world beneath. Goswell Street was at his feet, Goswell Street was on his right hand—and, as far as eye could reach, Goswell Street extended on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell Street was over the way.

There is a promise in these cheering words of wonderful things to come. Well might any one be content to gaze on Goswell street for ever. The first number of the "Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club" appeared on 31st March 1836, and as it was soon succeeded by others, the name, the love affair, the proposal through chops and tomato sauce, the breach of promise suit, the trial, and its result all passed into the region of fame. Pickwickian canes, hats, and cigars



## VII. MR. K. NATARAJAN

**B**UDDHIST Chronicles tell the story of a student at the Nalanda University famed for its medical studies. After seven years' residence he went to the rector with the request to be permitted to go out into the world and practise the art of healing. The rector set him a single question to test his knowledge and gave him six months to answer it in. The question was, which tree or plant in a radius of five miles from Nalanda did *not* have medicinal value. The student at the end of the term, approached the rector with the answer that he found that there was *no* plant or herb within a radius of five miles, which had no curative properties.

I recall this ancient tradition when I respond to the Editor's request to write of books which have influenced me. I cannot think of any book which I have perused that did *not* influence me one way or another.

Mathew Arnold in his essay on Marcus Aurelius speaks of people who live to read and people who read to live. I would class myself in the second category. Nearly all the influence in my life barring that of heredity, should be traced to books. The Royal Readers which I read in the middle school stage were a source of never failing delight and instruction. They were beautifully got-up in fine type on fine paper, and had what I can only describe as a perfume about them when freshly bought on promotion to a higher class at the beginning of the academic year. The selections, prose and verse, were admirably chosen to interest and instruct. The importance of punctuality was inculcated in the story of Solomon Slow "the son of a gentleman" who was always five minutes too late. On one occasion, he missed the bus for a picnic which he was very anxious to join. I see his picture in the book running breathlessly to catch the coach which was just turning a corner. He missed it. He bitterly

regretted this habit of being late and, we are left to conclude that he never there after failed to be in time for his engagements!

Then, there was the story of a hawker selling coloured caps, who on a hot day lay down in the shade of a tree for rest. He fell asleep and on waking found numerous monkeys grinning at him from their perch high up on the bough each with one of his caps on its head. I do not remember what exactly the moral conveyed was, but even though nearly seventy years have gone by, I feel the fun, in relating the story which I felt on first reading it.

A story which produced a deep impression on my boyish mind was that of a man who was always boasting of his personal prowess. One day he *with* a friend was walking in a forest when a bear suddenly emerged on the scene. The boastful man at once took to his heels while his companion lay down and feigned death so perfectly that the bear

after sniffing at the prostrate body, lurched away leaving the man unharmed. When the beast was out of sight, the boastful person approached his friend and asked him what the bear whispered in his ear! The reply was, "it told me never to trust braggarts." This was the moral. In addition, I learnt that bears will not harm dead people, that is, people from whom they need fear no harm. The poems in the Royal Readers were no less admirably chosen. They touched all the higher levels of emotions, grief, pity, sympathy as well as sheer joy. They were also instructive. For example, the poem—I forget the title—about climbing a hill.

Standing at the foot, boys,  
Gazing at the sky,  
How can you get up, boys  
If you never try!

The lesson of perseverance in the face of repeated failure was conveyed in the beautiful poem "King Bruce and the Spider". I can still repeat by heart the story of the Collier's child on his deathbed, the mother watching silently by his side.

while the night was dark and stormy and the wind was howling wild outside. The collier comes in after his day's work. "The mother and the father met, but neither spoke a word". Even as a small boy I understood the anguish which sealed their lips. The story of John Gilpin's headlong ride, through London town, amused me greatly. Though it was late in life that I did ten thousand miles of sea voyage, I felt the fascination of the sea even as a boy when reading poems like *Casabianca*, "the Loss of the Royal George" and "the Wreck of the *Hesperus*."

I did not find the least difficulty in understanding these stories, on the contrary, I felt them intuitively. They were formative elements in my life. On the ground that they were foreign to Indian life, special Readers were written for Indian schools at the instance of the Educational Department. Most of these Orient readers lacked the inspiration of the Royal Readers. The Universal in boyhood to which the

Royal Readers appealed was beyond the comprehension of the departmental text book makers. The themes which appealed to them were mostly those peculiar and particular to Indian life.

Byron bitterly complained that having had to learn Horace as a text book at school, he came to hate the very name of the great Latin poet. I did not feel repelled by authors whom I first came to know through text-books. Of the trinity, Byron, Shelley and Keats, I love Keats most. On the threshold of my college career, I came across in a relative's small library, Keat's heartening lines, "Shed no tear, O shed no tear, the flower will bloom another year." I have often and often cheered myself up with them in moments of utter gloom. Wordsworth's ideas are too passive to kindle a spark in my Brahmanic nature. Tennyson's "Higher Pantheism" can be matched word for word from the Katha Upanishad and the Bhagavadgita. But Browning strikes a note to which I responded with my whole soul. "The

sin I impute to each frustrate ghost, is the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin though the end in sight, is a vice, I say" corresponds to the Gita call to action even if enveloped by evil as fire by smoke. Browning lashed Wordsworth fiercely for his recantation of his sympathy for the French revolution. "He alone shrinks from the van and the foeman, he alone sinks to the slaves". In all his poems, Browning preached the gospel of right action without regard to consequences. Failure is the prelude to success. The effort is the main thing, "The prize is in the process." "We fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake". Browning's philosophy is that of Sri Krishna.

I am in this paper referring to English authors who have influenced me. "Endeavours After the Christian Life" by the unitarian philosopher and divine, James Martineau is a book to which I revert often for spiritual sustenance. Among European writers to whose works in English translations I owe much are Ibsen

(Norwegian) and Lessing (German). Lessing's "Nathan the Wise" indeed, marks a crucial moment in my mental and spiritual growth. Until I came across this work in an English translation in Cassell's pocket series of classical authors, I had almost wholly depended on Western sources for intellectual and spiritual nourishment. Lessing taught me to look to our own heritage. The drama relates to the period of the Crusades. Nathan was a wealthy Jew. He combined in himself the character of a merchant and philosopher. He was Saladin's close friend. Saladin was the soul of chivalry. He too was deeply interested in religion. One day Saladin asks his friend why he, a man of great intellectual attainments, should stick to an unhistorical religion like Judaism, while Islam was a historical religion which should appeal to him. Nathan's answer went home to me. It was in effect What is History? It has to be taken on trust, is it not? Why should I think that my forefathers deliberately

particularly), Frederic Harrison (Oliver Cromwell and Essay on George Elliot in Choice of Books), Thomas Huxley (Ethics and Evolution), Leslie Stephen, Walter Bagehot (Physics and Politics), Sir Henry Maine (Ancient Law and Early History of Institutions), William James and Emerson (among American authors), Bergson (Creative Evolution), Smuts (Holism). This is a sample list which is not yet closed. I am almost daily coming on books (latterly the proportion of them by Indian authors tends to predominate) which suggest, inspire and sharpen insight. Strange to say Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhiji have left me cold. Swami Vivekananda has impressed me more, Mahadev Govind Ranade has much influenced my approach to social and political questions. Ranade's maxim that the reformer does not write on a clean slate has been a permanent factor in my thought, as Edmund Burke's saying that one should touch the wounds of the state (or society) as tenderly as a



MR. DILIP KUMAR ROY

“**B**OOKS,” he said. “Books. One reads so many and sees so few people, and so little of the world. Great thick books about the universe and the mind and ethics. You have no idea how many there are. I must have read twenty or thirty tons of them in the last five years. . . . Weighted with that one is pushed out into the world.”\*

I agree and disagree. Only the reason for disagreement would here be relevant.

Those who have made love to the world at one remove through books have much to gain when they turn subsequently to the direct courtship. For then when they contact it they often know it better; so much so that even falling headlong in love, in real life, becomes more convincing than in the antecedent world of imagination. You know the world of fact better for having known it less perfectly through

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\* “Crome Yellow,” a novelette by Aldous Huxley.

books before. At any rate that was my reaction to the "people" and the "world" when I was pushed out into it, in Europe, in 1922, at two and twenty.

I saw in fancy then the savages, our ancestors, who had never imagined the wisdom their descendents would acquire through book-lore.

But does that prove that we are really wiser than they? Or is there something after all in the wisdom that books give, a wisdom which overawed Job, the rebel, who, even while blaspheming, said: "Oh, that my words . . . were now printed in a book!"\*

Whatever the verdict of wise men on this moot question, it cannot be gainsaid that it was books which first gave the uttered word a new significance. Fancy a gramophone record or a talkie film of to-day being suddenly sprung upon our grandchildren a century hence. Won't

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\* "The Book of Job," Chapter 9, The Old Testament.

they smile at their foolish ancestors? But a poem of Sri Aurobindo or the sayings of Sri Ramkrishna they will continue to study with an equal or probably a greater ravishment than ours.

And why? Obviously because somehow life often wins to a new significance through books in a way no other human mechanism can. Of course there are books and books as there are poets and poets. And history testifies that whenever a real book is produced it takes on a new kind of accent which gives to perishable words a strange posthumous longevity. We have no clue to the secret of this miracle. We only feel we know the art when we see it or shall we say the fire which makes pallid words break to iridescence. Not for nothing did Johnson say of Goldsmith that "no man was more foolish when he had not a pen in his hand or more wise when he had."<sup>\*</sup>

Few book-lovers will demur at this. For most bibliophiles must have felt

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\* Boswell's "Life of Johnson."

that recorded words can, on occasion, burn their dusks with almost a power of flame. That is why it is so difficult to assess the influence books wield on a man who thirsts for new heights of glory or gropes for strange avenues to joy. Difficult because books talk in a tongue not quite human, with a resonance that sounds sometimes too ethereal to be "human nature's daily food." So when my friend Sri Natesan had first requested me to write for him an essay on the books that have influenced me I hesitated as it was a title where auto-biography would have to take a hand if it was to be vivid and readable at all. But he insisted and I had to yield. What persuaded me was this reminder that I have gained much in my life by others' glowing account of books. Did I not read "Plutarch's Lives" because Rolland was in ecstasies about it; A. E.'s poem because Sri Aurobindo had given them very high praise; Sri Aurobindo's "Essays on the Gita" because Krishnaprem (alias Ronald Nixon) panegyrised it—there-

are so many instances too numerous to mention. The moral: ego-centric though we are, we can profit by comparing notes about influences that have militated against our native ignorance and egotism; and one of the most potent of these is certainly the voice of books. So I decided to comply, resigned to this sad prescience that I should never lay my finger on what precisely seeped into me through the books that have helped me incalculably in my life's quest after the Elusive.

The book which exercised the most powerful influence on my early life and has remained to this day a thing of abiding inspiration might surprise a good many moderns. For it is certainly not "Das Capital" of Karl Marx or the works of Lenin or the downright statements about the nature and aim of life by the Parnassians of to-day, the men of science and fathers of the atomic bomb. What first swept me off my feet was simply the record of some homely talks of a man who had never read a book. It is entitled, in Bengali,



words: "Look you! Somebody had once administered a dose of opium to a peacock at 4 P.M. Next day, there the peacock materialised precisely at four!" (Laughter).

I have dwelt on this at some length because it is the best rejoinder to those robust moderns who are keen on travelling by the last bus (to quote a simile of Aldous Huxley) and the bus to-day happens to be that of mass-murder supplied plentifully with drinks of blood distilled by scientific humanity. Fortunately for humanity, Sri Ramkrishna, the most ubiquitous force for spirituality in our age, never knew nor cared that there was a such a thing as science and whenever Doctor Mahendra Sarcar went into ecstasies over the achievements of science he only smiled as a wise father smiled to a child entranced with a walking doll or a capering monkey. Sri Ramkrishna in his life-time prevented tens of thousands from becoming converts to aggressive Christianity and cultured Nihilism; but his-



unearthly) yet she could hardly emulate, for obvious reasons the inimitable intimacy of Sri Mahendra's style.

But she gave us a deep compensation: she conveyed the feel of her myriad-mooded Master with a power of word-portraiture which no biographer of Vivekananda has equalled since. She entered into the solitary's trackless heart with the passport of her imperious devotion which makes her book compelling as only a romance built of the stuff of reality can be. For what she achieved will remain one of the purest romances ever written in any language and yet a vivid document of love between a born dreamer of the West and a deathless dream-builder of the East.

I would rejoice to talk of our great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. But I have thought better of it. For one cannot talk of what fashions atom by atom the nucleus that is the religious soul. One only feels the tradition in one's blood but hardly analyses it. It has of late



Bankim Chandra Chatterji and my own father, Dwijendralal Roy. The former's masterly analysis of Krishna and the latter's historical and mythological dramas made me feel proud as a peacock of our gorgeous aristocracy and gleaming tradition. Bankim Chandra's subtle justification of the bewildering contradictions of the strange and yet irresistible manoeuvrer Krishna planted fairly early in me the seeds of worship of that supreme and perhaps the most baffling of Avatars. But Bankim explained too much and, to prove more convincing still, he wrote a novel (one of his weakest) *Devi Choudhurani*. It was essentially a long apologue with a moral that for humanity a many-mooded human personality was life's summit ideal as exemplified by the historical apocalypse that was Krishna. The two together, however, made an indelible impression on my juvenile mind. Then came, in my adolescence, his two unforgettable novels whose influence I struggled so hard to slough off in subsequent life. The first of

these was *Ananda Math* which preached patriotism and the second was *Bishoriksha* which gave me my first thrill and fear of sex conveyed through its marvellous plot-weaving. This deepened into rapture under the aegis of his most powerful novel, *Krishnakanta* still painted with all the seduction of illicit love. In Bharatchandra's *Vidyasundar*, which I hugged next, this pictorial pornography was carried by the competent poet to its zenith rapture.

The patriotism was indeed difficult to eschew once for all: nevertheless I could disclaim it by and by, specially after my initiation in the philosophy of Bertrand Russel, Tolstoy, George Duhamel, Romain Rolland and Bernard Shaw. But success here would have been more difficult to achieve had not Dwijendralal paved its way through his magnificent drama, "Fall of Mevar." It has been a favourite ever since, notwithstanding the large popularity of his "Shajahan and Jahangir." For "Fall of Mevar" is to me more than a drama: it is a

nascent faith in internationalism and human brotherhood. This must not be taken to mean that I prize it any the less as a dramatic work of art. On the contrary I am persuaded it was because of the power of its dramatic art that I was converted overnight. Of all the dramas written in prose (though Somerset Maugham rightly regrets in his magnificent "Summing up" that the drama should have discarded verse for prose as its medium) I have loved best three: Shaw's "Saint Joan," Tolstoy's "The Live Corpse" and last though not least, "this powerful and moving" drama, "Fall of Mevar"\* which marked in my own evolution the end of an epoch.

But it was a much more difficult struggle when I came to grips with the sugary message of sex, for though sweet at first, the outer coating wore off betray-

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\* Published this year in Bombay by the Nalanda Publications. The quotation is from a personal letter Jawaharlal wrote to me from Almora about the drama after having read it "under the pines."



life and that no great art could be produced without the keen suffering which is an appanage of sexuality. To-day I am fully persuaded that an artist—unless he be a mystic as well—seldom proves a good guide because it is the God-intoxicate alone who hold the key to the enigma of life. For the highest achievement of human endeavour is union with the Divine which is the authentic mystic's message. So I accepted Sri Ramkrishna against Bankim who preached a complete social life rounded off by humanist ideals and supported by disciplined sensuality. But this final acceptance had involved a long penultimate struggle where it was often touch and go with my resolution. I want to underline hereby how terribly tenacious the hold of half-truths can be when they are propagated by a powerful artist.

So books were not an unmixed blessing, I discovered to my bitter disillusion, and therefore turned all the more eagerly to the Ramakrishna Vivekananda literature. A good many churned me to my very vitals.



kind of meat tough or sweet—because, though I must confess to having derived an ephemeral pleasure from just satisfying my appetite with whatever invited my palate, I cannot help but regret that I knew no better then. The time I wasted on these I could have utilised in learning Sanscrit better than I did and even learn Greek to read Plato in the original. For I was fascinated early by the entrancing figure of Socrates who shone out so bewitchingly even through English translations of the Greek philosopher. But it was the romance of the guru-and-disciple relationship that held me entranced specially in the Dialogues. And it worked like magic in that it replenished my faith in values which the moderns in those days ridiculed as outmoded. The result was : the pernicious doctrine of “art for art’s sake” fell off my mind like a coloured slough. When I turned once more to the Gospel of Sri Ramkrishna after this emancipation I felt it had in the meanwhile gained an added force. It sustained me—almost worked an amulet. I began to

read it even more searchingly specially when the dangers of London, Paris and Berlin life beckoned to me too seductively. And it helped. There were three other great books that gave me help of this kind: "What is Art" by Tolstoy, "Memoirs of a Revolutionist" by Prince Kropotkin and "John Christopher" by Romain Rolland.\* I must confess regretfully that I have been forced to disown Tolstoy in my later thirties. Rolland and Russell helped me in this orientation till I realised little by little that the Russian Count though a great artist was a bad philosopher. But for Kropotkin and Rolland my admiration has if anything increased in dimensions. The former filled me with enthusiasm for socialism; the latter for internationalism and human brotherhood as against that cancer of our civilization: parochial patriotism. These

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\* I leave out Dostoevski's "Brothers Karamazov" because though it is surely one of the most powerful novels ever written by a visionary, yet its language, generally, is morbid affects to the mouth. A morbid art though it thrills for the nonce has, alas, to be paid for heavily.

have certainly been two of the most abiding influences in my life, though I must add that by socialism I do not imply communism in practice which repelled me more and more by its religion of hatred and intolerance and love of dogmatic slogans (like the dictatorship of the proletariat). Rolland—and afterwards Aldous Huxley—showed clearly that even when the masses had to be emancipated the only ones who could give the lead were men of an exceptional intelligence and imagination, like Prince Kropotkin or Tolstoy, or Lenin.

Just as these two books made me see European culture in a new light even so the books of Bertrand Russell made me see from a new angle the value of the creative spirit of man as against the possessive. Among these—for I avidly read all his books except *Principia Mathematica*—the ones which made the profoundest impression on me in England were “*Principles of Social Reconstruction*, *Roads to Freedom*, *Practice and theory of*



For if such were the real character of this quixotic life of brief spasm and swoon then what on earth could be a wiser Commandment than: Verily I say unto you, that the wisest man travels light, eating, drinking and being merry, jettisoning morality, only taking just enough care to circumvent the policeman round the corner"—which is, by the way, what millions so brilliantly achieve and presumably will go on doing till the final Crash. To call life a meaningless interlude of whatever it is (since even consciousness is not admitted by science!) and then to hope for a basis of values is to expect fruit from burnt seeds. It is the babble of Bedlam.

Fortunately, real thinkers everywhere are waking up at long last from this grotesque nightmare of rational lunacy, as Gerald Heard, the brilliant Yogic thinker has so ably pointed out with a sigh of relief in his fine criticism of Science, "This Surprising world," and then in his two strong exegeses: Code of Christ and Creed of



and cynicism. But I cannot honestly say that this book ever actually influenced me. It struck me as significant, that was all. What filled me with admiration was his introduction to "Letters of D. H. Lawrence." Somehow hitherto Lawrence had never made any very deep impression on me. It was Huxley's preface on his fiery guru that first made me take him more seriously and since then I have read all the books of this impressive paranoiac. In the process I was partly converted because I felt that there was a pronounced streak of the Yogi in him. This found its best expression in his remarkable book "Fantasia of the Unconscious" which no Indian interested in the heart's authentic vision can afford to miss. For it exposes the root of the malady of our present civilization which wants to build a life without a correct appraisal of its spiritual plinth: inevitably, since without a correct initial vision of the primary aims of existence there can be no subsequent

formulation of its correct values. For, as Lawrence too says in his "Fantasia" and justly: "Men live and see according to some gradually developing and gradually withering vision. . . . Then it is unfolded into life and art. Our vision, our belief, our metaphysic is wearing woefully thin, and the art is wearing absolutely threadbare." Therefore, he rightly concludes, "We've got to rip the old veil of a vision across and find what the heart really believes in after all."

I had a dim perception, ever since I had learnt to depend on the vision of Sri Ramkrishna, that only those inner-pieces which aided us in acquiring this vision could be styled real and artistic. This vision having now grown clearer I have known better than to exorcise dealing with ephemera, however transient by the name of Art with a capital A. I mention Lawrence not to set it to ecstasies over his idolatry of seeing the profoundest worship of life—for such this view could only derive from time

aberration of his intellect the reason of which is far too complicated to go into in this brief survey. But if the greatness of a man is the greatness of his greatest moments, the greatness of the world of books would be the greatness of its starriest wisdom. Thus one may safely award that the most potent inspiration of Lawrence is conveyed through his magnificent "Letters." For though he wrote these to different people from different strands of his consciousness and as such must be frequently disappointing, yet while reading them one is so often overwhelmed by a marvellous vision clearly breaking through that one becomes dimly conscious of what Huxley meant when he wrote in his illuminating preface: "Of most other eminent people I have met I feel that at any rate I belong to the same species as they do; but this man is something different and superior in kind, not degree." And yet this tortured prophet actually preached the Gospel of capitulation to sex which burst out explosively in his-

"Lady Chatterley's Lover." "I think", wrote Sri Aurobindo to me, "Lawrence was held back from realising because he was seeking for the new birth in the subconscious vital and taking that for the Invisible within—he mistook Life for Spirit, whereas Life can only be an expression of the Spirit. That too was perhaps the reason for his preoccupation with a vain and baffled sexuality." I have already referred to the inequalities in the man, the different strands of his consciousness. So the less said about this lamentable lapse the better.

To end now on one of the deepest melodies of this age of din and glare. The singer was the Irish mystic George Russell alias A. E. who sang the Name not for its pith but for its truth.

But I have touched the lips of clay,  
Mother, thy rudest sod to me  
Is thrilled with fire of hidden day.  
And haunted by all mystery.

Which is reminiscent of Sri Aurobindo's :

All music is only the sound of his laughter,  
All beauty the sound of his passionate bliss;  
Our lives are his heart-beats, our rapture  
the bridal  
Of Radha and Krishna, our love is their kiss.

I do not suggest A. E. came anywhere near the depth and comprehensiveness of Sri Aurobindo whose poetry mounts "from harmony to heavenly harmony" but leads "the diapason" not to close "full on Man" but on Divinity realised through complete union :

"He who I am was with me still ;  
All veils are breaking now.  
I have heard His voice and borne His will  
On my vast untroubled brow."\*

I know very well that A. E. is not recognised by some highbrow critics in Europe as a pure poet. But I am unperturbed. For my object to-day is not to write away as a critic but only to say how I have reacted to voices that

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\* Quoted from Sri Aurobindo's poem "A God's Labour."

have moved the deepest chords of my heart. Pure poetry I delight in, for it is delightful, but somehow its "flying trees" leave me fundamentally unsatisfied. What I seek from poetry is not mere æsthetic rasa: I demand from it a guiding inspiration for evolving life. In other words, poetry if I am to accept its leading should help me ascend the uphill path to Divinity. A.E.'s poetry has given me just such an aid. What more do I need?

This must not be interpreted however as anything like an admission that I can accept that A.E. is not a great poet. No, can I for a moment admit that as a poet he matters less than the musical Yeats or the mellifluous Swinburne. His style as well as poetic personality seems to me too quintessential to be dismissed lightly. When one feels that he presents the most austere of truths in a rhythm that is clear and unadorned, and without stopping at the state of the intellect to put it in one's verbal possession, one is naturally and justifiably impressed with his new Art. Truly, he is a poet of the

only of the ancient certitudes but of the aspirations of the modern man with his loveliest thrills in song and sigh. The other day I wrote to Jawaharlal and while extolling his "Discovery of India" I vented a regret that even he should have equated mysticism to haziness and obscurantism. But the Reality of realities could hardly be this. On the contrary it is too heart-breakingly real to be dismissed as a chimera. Even omnipotent Science, I wrote, with all its growing power of outlawing God has utterly failed to outlaw this sigh of Man for the only Attainment that creates things of beauty and bliss out of the raw material of life. And I enclosed a poem of A.E.—The Outcast:

Sometimes, when alone,  
At the dark close of day  
Men meet an outlawed Majesty  
And hurry away.

They come to the lighted house,  
They talk to their dear,  
They crucify the mystery  
With words of good cheer.

When love and life are over  
And flight is at an end,  
On the outcast Majesty  
They lean as Friend.

A. E. is what he is because his verse makes the Unseen so vividly lower round him almost like a half-seen aura of affirmation: "There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which He beareth of me is true."

But I would anticipate the reader who would infer from this that it is merely the rich psychic pabulum in A. E.'s verse that I fed on hungrily. Even darkness is lit up with cosmic rays. Only it does not pierce the eye that sees. A. E. is not a statement of truth about God or Love seldom goes down with our beautiful life. It is true A. E. that we all capture because his poetry reveals the Truth he envisioned. All the same, perhaps he was too early a prophet to be because he expressed his vision with the poet's eye of about a dozen years ago. But more than a prophet, he was a poet. For the last ten years of his life he was a poet. He was a poet.

meant at least as much to me as that of A. E. or Sri Aurobindo. But though poets-like Yeats, Tagore or Keats gave me a joy which it would be foolish to disclaim, it would be lunacy for me to say in deference to the highbrow critics that the message of these was for me as light is to the eyes or warmth to the love-thirsty heart. None of them could, for example, charm away a sense of dereliction (that has often over-taken me in life's slough of despond) as has been done again and again when I repeated A. E.'s lines :

I sometimes think a mighty Lover  
Takes every burning kiss we give,  
His lights are those which round us hover  
For Him alone our lives we live.

Or Sri Aurobindo's description of Savitri's spirit of purity:

Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,  
 Passionate in flow, had not one turbid  
 wave . . .

A heart of silence in the hands of joy  
Inhabited with rich creative beats,  
A body like a parable of dawn  
That seemed a niche for veiled Divinity  
Or golden temple-door to things beyond.

The last line gives, almost apocalyptically, what I have always wanted poetry to do.

for me: to open a golden temple-door  
with a royal movement of beauty's neck.  
beggar life quails even to approach

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## IX. RAJKUMARI AMRIT KAUR

“WE see then how far the monuments of wit and learning are more durable than the monuments of power, or of the hands. For have not the verses of Homer continued twentyfive hundred years or more without the loss of a syllable or letter; during which time infinite palaces, temples, castles, cities have been decayed or demolished.

“It is not possible to have the true pictures or statues of Cyrus, Alexander, Cæsar; no, nor of the kings or great personages of much later years; for the originals cannot last, and the copies cannot but lose of the life and truth. But the images of men's wits and knowledge remain in books, exempted from the wrong of time and capable of perpetual renovation. Neither are they fitly to be called images, because they generate still, and cast their seeds in the minds of others, provoking and causing, infinite actions and opinions in succeeding ages: so that, if the invention of the ship was thought to be noble,





goods. The world may have shut its ears to the message of the inspired pages but the story of Jesus remains as a light to lighten humanity for all time.

The fifth Century B. C. gave birth to a galaxy of great souls throughout the world. Confucius and Lao-tze in China, Isaiah in Judaea, Gautama Buddha in India and Socrates in Greece.

Edwin Arnold's "The Light of Asia" has never ceased to inspire me. I can turn to it again with infinite joy. Once more it is the great renunciation that thrills the heart, the story of which is told in such exquisite language and perfect imagery in this great poem.

Truth cannot perish on the cross nor in the poisoned cup which was administered to Socrates for bearing witness to it. "The Trial and Death of Socrates" left an impress on me while I was still in school. In later years the life and teachings of the great martyr were more vividly brought home by the writings of his great disciple. Plato's "The Republic" is surely

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one of the books that has through the ages instigated the search for the good life not only for the individual but also for society. His 'words of wisdom' are always a delight to peruse. "Grant to me that I may be made beautiful in my soul within and that all external possessions be in harmony with my inner man. May I consider the wise man rich and may I have such wealth as only the self-restrained man can bear or endure" is a prayer of Socrates and as soul-filling a prayer as anyone could choose to have.

"The Pilgrim's Progress" written by the persecuted and unlearned thinker is the age-long story of the great conflict between good and evil told in simple and telling language. Which of us has not come up against Giant Despair and not fallen into the Slough of Despond? Is not the world a veritable "Vanity Fair" and are we not always coming across those very human characters, good and bad, with the apt names given to them all by the author? Few books appeal equally to children as



downfall of her great husband's kingdom and the frustration of his dreams.

And what of the giant Shakespeare?

"Not marble nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme".

How truly he spoke of himself! From the fairy atmosphere of "The Midsummer Night's Dream", the charming tale of "Cymbeline," the matchless love story of "As You Like It", the magic lure of "The Tempest", the brilliance of "The Merchant of Venice", the noisy drollery of "The Merry Wives of Windsor"; one goes with the same fascination to the great tragedies of "Julius Caesar", "Hamlet", "Macbeth" and "Antony and Cleopatra". Disloyalty, ingratitude, deceit, cruelty, ambition and their opposing virtues are all depicted by the master hand in their true colours in these as well as in the historical plays. The stories may veer from the truth as far as history or legend go but the characters of human beings are as true to life as possible and portrayed with all the wealth of colour that the brush of a



Hugo's "Les Miserables" and "The Hunchback of Notre Dame", Moliere's "L' Avare" and Racine's "Le Cid", but I cannot say the same of the great literature of my own country. Translations of the Ramayana and Mahabharata in both English and Hindi have gripped me but I have unfortunately no knowledge of Sanskrit. Those who will be educated in the new India will, at any rate, have a pull over us who were of the generation that were brought up on English literature. The double heritage will surely be a richer one.

Finally I cannot express in words the immense influence exercised over me by the writings of the greatest man of our age. They have led me to throw in my lot with Gandhiji so that thereby I might learn how to live truly. The latest exploits in war have surely proved beyond doubt that his way of life is the only way if this world of ours is to survive.

May he be enabled to live long enough to lay well and truly the foundations of the Swaraj of his conception so that India may lead the world into the paths of peace..

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N. MR. M. RUTHINASWAMY

I HAVE taken the liberty of putting a narrower interpretation on the title of this article than the Editor had in his mind when he asked me to contribute to this series. I take it to mean books that have influenced my mind. For books that have influenced the making of my character and moral being would take me into regions into which the majority of the readers of the *Indian Review* would not be willing or interested enough to follow me.

It was not till I reached the High School classes in St. Joseph's College (as it then was) at Cuddalore that I began to choose books myself. Till then the usual children's books, Grimm's *Fairy Tales* and Hans Christian Anderson's *Tales* had been thrown in my way and had stored my childhood's imagination with the scenes and heroes and heroines of Fairy Land. *Swiss Family Robinson* was a book I delighted in reading even at meal time to the mild surprise of the Refectory supervisors. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was another introduction

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to tales of travellers which have always been a favourable form of light reading. It was when I was in the V or VI form that I came across in the Boarding House Library of St. Joseph's College an American book called "*A Gentleman*" by Maurice Francis Egan, an essayist and critic of some repute who became U. S. A. Minister at the Hague about the time of the first World War. This book which was in the main a handbook of etiquette drove home the view that in the making of a gentleman intellectual tastes are an integral factor. To form the literary taste of a gentleman he could recommend no better book than Newman's *Idea of a University*. I do not know whether I had spoken about it to my father, but it was a joyful surprise to me when on my birthday, in August 1902 when I was in the Junior F.A. Class, I received it as a present. Since then it has always been with me. I began reading it when I could not have understood all that I read, and I read it again now when I want to fortify myself against the jazz of modern prose.

Another landmark in my life as a student was the reading of Lord Acton's *Inaugural Lecture on Modern History*. All my guidance in historical and political reading has come from Lord Acton and the later collection of his historical and political studies. In England I obtained the list of One Hundred Best Books which he had drawn up at the invitation of Sir John Lubbock the first compiler of these lists of One Hundred Best Books which used to be fashionable with literary lions in England early this century. It was Lord Acton who sent me to Burke as "the master of those that know" in politics. I have read and reread his *Correspondence* and his *Speeches and Writings*, the chief of them being the *Speeches on America*, *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, the *British Speeches*, the *French Revolution*. Burke has been my master but not my dictator in politics. Through Acton also I came to know and to read in great that great work of German history, *Histories of Germany*. I have not been able

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to read it in full—it would require a lifetime to read those four bulky volumes of about 500 pages each. But I have read enough to learn the lesson that Gierke was striving to drive home with characteristic German *grundlichkeit* that the State is not the cock of the walk in the political field, that Corporations, ecclesiastical, especially the Church, and lay, have a right to live their own autonomous, free life without leave of the State asked or taken. This was also the lesson learnt from the works of another great historical scholar F.W. Maitland who although Downing Professor of the Laws of England, was called by Acton the greatest English historian of his time.

Through Acton also I was introduced to another great German writer, Constantine Frantz from whose *Naturlehre des Staats* I learnt to establish my political creed on the foundations of Nature and Necessity and raise the structure in the spirit of Freedom. Nature and Freedom—things as they are and things as they ought to be—

are the twin guides of all sound political thought and action. Freedom rests both on the facts and circumstances of a people's life is bound to be unstable and political life dominated by the facts of life is bound to stick fast in the ancient ways. Always it was Frantz the great opponent in the years 1855-1875 of the political unionism, Bismarck the founder of German unity with blood and iron and who taught long before federation became the fashion that that was the way of political salvation of Germany and Central Europe that contained my federal birth. That birth I had imbibed in my undergraduate days at Cambridge, again on the advice of Acton from the *Liberal* composed by Humboldt, Hegel and the three of the great leaders of the German nation of the 19th C. A. The *Liberal* is the Bible of all political thinking.

Not to Acton but to the great Englishman an English translation of the *Principles of Political Economy* by John Stuart Mill and one after the other the great teachers of the 19th C. The

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educational works on the making of character in school and in the home have largely influenced my views on education. And his *Politische Ethik and Paedagogik* was a revelation to me with its insistence on the making of individual and social character as the best means of education in citizenship. He denounced the method of pumping of so much political information into the minds of immature children, so popular with the makers of our school courses and syllabuses in civics and so well calculated to kill all enthusiasm for citizenship and defeat all attempts at the making of good citizens. It is a pity that only a few of Foerster's works have been translated into English, but those that have been *Lebenskunde* (by the Moral Education League, London) *Youth and Sexual morality* translated by Meyrick Booth ought to be found in every teacher's library.

These are all books of knowledge. Of books of power, Shakespeare's plays I have tried to read at the rate of one a year. I prefer Dickens to Thackeray. Of

Walter Scott I have read a dozen. Poetry I keep in touch through Peacock's *Gleanings of Europe*, if only to save myself from the dismal fate of Darwin who confessed with tears in his words that the mastery of Science had killed in him all appreciation of poetry. Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* and *Through the Hedge* are a constant companion—I put my children with them in my little library and they seem the lighter for this library. But I have read whole pages and chapters of Macaulay's *History of England* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—I have taken from them the best of historical narrative and writing. I have read how to read all the best "Texts and Authors version" I have ever seen. I have read the "Hall of English Literature."

Following Horace's advice that one should make a full man, I have attempted to make the library I read from a library with a study of some kind. I have read Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Metaphysics*, and I have read the *Principles of Psychology* and the *Principles of Ethics*.

*sciences naturelles*. That Darwin's theory of evolution was not, as he stated it, materialistic I learnt from the reading of this scientific classic but I had also learnt from the work of a Canadian Catholic writer Zahm that Evolution is compatible with Theism. And, that development is the law of the being of every fruitful idea or institution I had already learnt from Newman's *Development of Christian Doctrine* which as a matter of fact had preceded Darwin's *Origin of Species* by some years, and which had taught that "here on earth to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often". De Candolle acquainted me with the fact that of all beings which live a social life man is the most aggressive, more aggressive for instance than the bee or the ant, that the formation of classes is peculiar to the human species, a truth which the Bolshevik experiment has not been able to disprove, and that the classless society is an Utopian dream, that human progress is slow, for the human species changes less

slowly but more decisively than the animal or the vegetable and that an exaggerated idea of the hereditary of physical and intellectual qualities is the product of superficial observation in all ages. Alex. Coste's *Life of the Lincolns*, is a recent scientific treatise that has taught me the truth that our knowledge of men has not kept pace with our knowledge of nature, and that man's control over himself is not a common one with his control over nature.

There are the chief of my books that have influenced the course of my life's work. More than the others they have given me I owe to them the making of a career and a chart that have guided me in the 'chaotic ocean' of modern literature.

## XI. MR. B. SANJEEVA RAO

**B**OOKS are our gurus. It is through literature that we wake up to the meaning of the world around us, to the sadness as well as the beauty of life, its tragedy and its epic grandeur. Books constitute one of the most potent means of discovering the secret wealth of aspiration and longing that constitutes the unique thing which we call our personality. They are, therefore, a valuable aid to the process of self-discovery and self-knowledge. Every book reveals in ourselves unsuspected depths of feeling, of sympathy and also of antipathy, of insight and understanding, of capacity for heroism and self-sacrifice, of love for beauty, but also much ugliness, cruelty, jealousy, lust. Reading intelligently can become a mode of attaining a supreme self-awareness.

There are two ways in which a book may be read—one conscious and the other the sub-conscious. This conscious study of books is not necessarily the most important

or the most significant method of reading—Conscious thought is different from life and arises from the breaking up by the mind of the integrity of our being. The apprehension by the sub-conscious of the content of a book which is something more than what is actually said and includes a great deal which is merely suggested, is a more complete way of reading.

I discovered as a boy that reading a book which was above my intellectual reach was quite often a rare spiritual experience. It was in some such fashion that I read a volume of Newman's sermons. I was transported to the Church of St. Mary in Oxford, joined invisibly the congregation which listened to the music of Newman's sermons, or rather the outpourings in the most exquisite prose of a passionately sincere soul striving to reconcile the intuitions of a profound mind with the conclusions of an irrefragable logic. I was quite ignorant of Newman's theological *difficulties*, or of the controversies of the *Tractarian Movement*. But Newman *came within myself*

by the magic of his wonderful gift of expression the capacity to appreciate the soul of the Catholic Church, its mysticism, the tender yet stern discipline of its organisation, the marvellous appeal of its music, the splendour of its ritual and above all its compelling call for a complete sacrifice of the personal will to the Will of God.

George Eliot introduced me to and made me familiar with the two great conflicting trends of thought and feeling, the rational and the mystical, desire for fulness of life and the ideal of the ascetic symbolised by the Renaissance and the monasticism of the Middle ages. Florence became to me a living city recreated by the genius of George Eliot, Savonarola, the Duomo and the Campanile, the Frescoes of Fra-Angelico, Medieval mysticism and medieval art became living forces, the two poles of human aspiration and thought between which the human spirit has continuously swung through the ages.

The Fioretti of St. Francis showed me another side of Christianity, its passionate-

pity and tenderness for the poor, its glad willingness to bear the burden of human sorrow. These books stand out in my memory as marking the first early steps in my great adventure in understanding. I was convinced of one thing, that man is urged by one single and simple desire to know, to know the world, and ultimately to know himself and to live fully in that knowledge. Every book, every work of art is but the expression of this fundamental urge to find, to discover the meaning of life and to transmit that knowledge to others. The history of man's amazing adventure is full of errors, of tragic failures. But every error is significant, for it is but a partial or exaggerated truth. So the study of man's failures is as important as the study of his triumphs. The study of mystical Christianity, of medieval art and architecture, of humanism brought me a complete understanding of man's struggle towards a fully integrated life in which the claims of the spirit were to be reconciled with the desire for a full life.

Later came another revelation from a group of writers Carlyle, Ruskin, Emerson and in Poetry—Wordsworth and Tennyson. I am afraid my conscious mind did not take in all that these writers said in their books. But they supplied the spiritual need of the generation to which I belonged. I might not have understood the full significance of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. But I knew although I could not say how or why—that Carlyle had attained a temporary spiritual self-transcendence, that his mind had been illumined by a wisdom greater than that of his individual self. Emerson was a little more intelligible—but his appeal was to a layer of my being which was beyond and above that of the thinking mind, that comes with the easing of that conflict and tension which had been created in my mind by the challenge of Christianity and modern Scientific thought.

Ruskin was to me essentially a poet, though he used the medium of prose, who saw the principle of beauty in all things. He was in those days looked upon as a

-dreamer of noble dreams, an ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain. It is easier in these days to appreciate Ruskin when he has been more than justified. But half a century ago, one needed to exercise one's intuition to understand him and to realise that he was a constructive genius of the highest order. Wordsworth and Tennyson had their intellectual labels properly attached to them. I am glad I did not read the commentaries on their poems. I went to them for being cleansed and healed.

In the midst of the intellectual struggle created in the minds of our generation by the challenge of Western religious and scientific thought, came the golden eloquence of Annie Besant and Vivekananda, proclaiming the greatness, the universality of ancient Indian thought. To Annie Besant more than to any other teacher, I owe a debt which no service can ever repay. Her speeches and writings opened to me the portals of that ancient path that leads to the sanctuary of Truth. To me and to

many thousands like me the writings and speeches represented the highest of synthesis of the best in the East and the West in thought and life. Vivekananda and Annie Besant are the real creators of New India.

Let me not fail to pay my tribute of gratitude to a writer of undoubted spiritual genius, the late Mr. B. R. Rajam Iyer who exercised a very powerful influence in our generation through the pages of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Rajam Iyer was a spiritual genius of the highest order. But he died very young. But I feel sure that there are still many men now living who can remember the extraordinary inspiration of the *Prabuddha Bharata* when Rajam Iyer was its sole editor and contributor.

During the next few years I studied much that may have been of academic value, but was of little significance to my quest in my adventure in understanding. I pass on to an apparently accidental discovery of a little known book which had an extraordinary effect upon my life. It was a small book with an unattractive title "the-

Occult World" by Mr. A. P. Sinnett. I can hardly give any intelligible reason for the remarkable change in outlook, in inner and outer life that the reading of that book brought about. I read that book at one sitting in the Cambridge Union Library. I became aware of an instant change, a transformation of the inner personality. I knew of a certainty that all my personal ambitions, desires for a career died that evening. I felt utterly certain that I had contacted a Divine Order, a society of just men made perfect existing eternally in the heart of Reality. India was an important Centre in that great order. The motherland at once became to me a mystic entity, a symbol of a mighty regenerating force that was being poured out on the world for its salvation. When I came to the end of the book I knew that I had taken the resolve to dedicate myself to the supreme task of being an agent, however humble, of that Mighty Power that was sweeping over the world.

Yet another book which profoundly influenced me is a classic of Theosophical

literature, an ancient occult treatise translated by Mabel Collins—known as the *Light on the Path*. It contained instructions for all those who were willing to undergo the training and the discipline needed for becoming "a focus" of the Universal life. These two books stand out clearly, marking out the new life which was chosen for me, a life of service, of many trials and difficulties. They opened to me the gateway to a larger life.

During the long period of training and service, I became increasingly aware that books cease to have value when the inner living Teacher takes charge of one's life. Life itself becomes the teacher and every man and woman whom one comes into contact with, every situation and circumstance in life becomes the awakener, the teacher who holds the mirror to one's own inner nature and reveals all that is hidden in the sub-conscious. The Poet and the Dramatist are said to hold the mirror up to nature. It would be truer to say that they reveal the Divine in Nature, the significance

of every individual being, the secret truth implicit in every form, the blade of grass, the song of the bird, the sunset and the evening sky. Spiritual life begins with the perception of this beauty and the mystery of the Divine in things—but that this beauty revealed by the Poet and the artist is also implicit in the heart of man, that can be perceived only through the Inner Guide and Teacher.

I pass over many books written by very great and eminent men and women. That they exercised a great influence I will not deny. But I learnt directly from life and not through the medium of books. I was also in contact, in living touch with great and inspiring teachers of undoubted spiritual genius and so I have to exclude many books from my list.—I learnt very much more from the living teachers than from the records of their utterances.

But one teacher of outstanding eminence who, however, is not accessible except through his books, I must not forget to mention, Sri Aurobindo. His essays on the

## 136 BOOKS THAT HAVE INFLUENCED ME

Gita and the Divine Life constitute for me a great spiritual experience. His books have a quality shared by all great literature. They radiate a subtle spiritual power. If one is sensitive, one begins to be aware that reading is at the same time a realisation, that the written word is creative, that it gives to the reader not only a clear intellectual understanding, but an insight which enables him to perceive that which he has grasped with his mind. Reading is illumination. But it must be integral, with the whole of one's being. The essays on the Gita, and the Divine life constitute a most remarkable contribution to the study of ancient Indian thought.

I have selected a few out of the many books that I have read which have brought me a great understanding of life and its problems. Behind every book there is a living human soul. Through his book he seeks to give us the meaning of life as he sees it. Therefore every book sincerely written is of infinite value, for it is a revelation of one of the myriads of aspects



## XII. DR. SIR C. P. RAMASWAMI AIYAR

**M**Y father who was one of the special disciples of Professor Gopal Rao, a renowned literary connoisseur and teacher, was passionately devoted to English poetry of the Wordsworthian era and during the latter years of his life dedicated himself to the study of philosophy. Under his guidance, I began to devote concentrated attention to English literature, an acquaintance with which, in accordance with the tradition of my younger days, was regarded not only as indispensable but as the peak point of educational ambition. So influential was the European tradition that, by an irony of fate, my earliest studies were directed to the master-pieces of English literature and even later I studied not my mother-tongue but French. My serious, as apart from formal and academic, pre-occupation with Sanskrit and Tamil came much later. In other words, the training that I received was not unlike that which has been described with such detail by John Stuart Mill in his Autobiography—a book that should be in the hands of every parent and of every young man on the threshold of life in order to serve not only as a guide but also as a warning. The poesy and the attitude towards life of Keats and Shelley also exemplified in the earlier lyrical out-pourings of Words-

worth were formative influences during my earlier University career but the startling invasion of new ideas heralded by Darwin and Herbert Spencer and their championship of the theory of evolution, brought to the forefront a new approach towards life's problems and necessarily also towards art and literature. My generation bore the full brunt of the impact of the iconoclastic attack on established forms of belief and Darwin, Huxley and Tyndall very rapidly supplanted earlier preceptors and many of us emerged as agnostics. The revised version of the life history of the earth and of living species, the evolutionary doctrine as expounded so brilliantly in Sir John Frazer's "Golden Bough" and the transformed point of view in respect of human beliefs and practices broke down many barriers. Much was destroyed and little was built up to take its place. Nevertheless and by way of fierce and natural reaction there was a parallel urge towards romance and mystery and humour side by side with realism. It drove me to the study of Dickens and Thackeray on the one hand and Charles Reade, Dumas, Balzac and Victor Hugo on the other. The humour and the pathos of daily life and the psychology of liberation contended for mastery. The "Pickwick

Papers" of Dickens, Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" and "Esmond" and Reade's, "Cloister and the Hearth," Balzac's "Wild Asses Skin," "Pere Goriot" and other illustrations of the "Comedia Humaine" stimulated the comprehensive curiosity of those days.

Saturated as I was with the spirit of the English language, it was not difficult for me to appreciate the work of Hazlitt, Oliver Wendell Holmes (the author of the Breakfast Table series) and to savour the delicate and gentle irony of Charles Lamb which has been in a special manner resurrected by the Chinese satirist Lin Yu Tang. The influence of French literature and the re-discovery of French poetical art-forms in the nineties of the last century brought me into intimate contact with what has now proved to be an evanescent phase of English poetical development. This movement was represented by Henley and Lang, Dobson and Watson and other post-Tennysonian rebels against the Victorian way of thinking. Soon, however, the tragic implications of existence came more and more to the forefront even before the last war, and there were produced many books which revealed the discontent with the present ordering of world economy and demonstrated the desire to shatter the

world to bits and to remould it according to the heart's desire. Hardy, Meredith and Fitzgerald's rendering of Omar Khayyam from one point of view and from another the savagely satirical and formless poetry and prose culminating in T. S. Elliot's "Ulysses", were powerful influences to which I would have wholly succumbed but for the concentrated study which I took up a decade ago of the great sources of Hindu thought and speculation exemplified in the pristine Upanishads and in Sankara. The life and teachings of the greatest man that ever lived, the Lord Buddha, have exercised a profound spell over me and Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia" led me to the study of Buddhist religious and philosophic thought which has followed a path parallel to Vedantic speculation. The Gita as a synthesis of philosophy came only next in personal preference.

The clinging and poignant search for the absolute, the daring grasp of essentials coupled with passionate devotion towards a personal godhead which is manifested in Tamil devotional literature was a further corrective ; and if I were today asked to summarise my mental adventures amongst the classics, I would, in order of importance, furnish the following list:

The Upanishads, especially the Isa, Katha, Mandukya, Brihadaranyaka, Taittiriya and Swetaswatara. What has captured my allegiance is the type of lesson taught in the dialogue between Yama and Nachiketas regarding the things that are more excellent as well as the basic propositions enunciated and re-emphasised constantly in them that attainment comes not to the weakling nor to the followers of extravagance in life and thought nor to those who follow the path of misdirected or unattainable austerity.

Sankara's works which are an object-lesson in the unfettered freedom of intellectual research, and in the emotional sphere, the work of the great creative artists Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth of the early 19th century.

The romantic and realistic romances and novels of Europe commencing with Dickens and Thackeray and Dumas and culminating in Balzac and Flaubert and the Russian Masters.

The passionate out-pourings of devotional ecstasy contained in the work of the medieval Christian mystics and the Tamil Saints.

The contributions made by the leaders of psychological freedom and the exponents of clear-eyed mellowness starting with Plato and the neo Platonists and comprising Spinoza, Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, Herbert Spencer and Renan (in his *Vie de Jesus*) and culmi-

nating in the writings of Sir James Jeans and Eddington which have thrown a new flood of light on the workings of the Universe and have enlarged many mental and spiritual frontiers.

So far, I have referred to the serious side of literature generally; but equal in importance from a personal point of view have been these intellectual treats and puzzles for which Poe, Gaboriau, Wells, Conan Doyle and other Masters of the literature of incident have made themselves responsible. I frankly avow to an absorbing interest in so-called "thrillers."

As a reaction from the common-place and the sombre, I have been greatly fascinated by what may be called the literature of Nonsense and if I had to spend some months on a desert island, some of the indispensable items in my luggage will be the Operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, books like "Alice in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking Glass" and the rhymes of Edward Lear and his poetical descendants. Although unable to read him in the original, I have been not only attracted but greatly influenced by the Epigrams and verse of Horace; and the works of his literary descendants, Montaigne and Madame de Sevigne have been my constant companions.

The frank and direct approach to problems of life and of society initiated by Ibsen and Bernard Shaw in their dramas, by Bertrand Russel in his analysis of present day tendencies and developments and by Upton Sinclair in his review of world conditions before and during World War No. 2 have afforded me not only instruction but illumination. I should not omit my indebtedness to Landor whose penpictures of the noted characters of history contained in "Pericles and Aspasia" and "Imaginary Conversations" have been my constant solace.

If I were compelled to possess only half a dozen books I would perhaps give my choice to a volume of the ten Upanishads, to that masterpiece of verbal felicity and natural description, Kalidasa's "Meghasandesa", to the matchless epigrams of Bhartrihari and the works of Lamb, and Sainte Beuve and as an additional, *bonne bouche* a pocket edition of Horace.

But then, I should be sorry to be without a few volumes of Dumas and the two parts of the Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics.

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